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Book Reviews.

Old Testament History. By REV. PROFESSOR HENRY PRESERVED SMITH, D.D., Amherst College. [International Theological Library.] New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903. Pp. xxv + 512. \$2.50, *net*.

Any book should be judged, at least in part, by the principles and ideals by which the writer claims to be governed in producing it. What these are in a particular case may not be so easy to discover. But the author of this history leaves us in no doubt. The two fundamental characteristics of the historian of the Old Testament life, according to him, are (1) good judgment—ability to distinguish degrees of probability where there is uncertainty, (2) the ability to tell what he knows—to picture what he sees so that the readers also see it (pp. xii, xiii). It is possible that there are other criteria of a historian equally necessary, but without doubt these two are vitally important. Professor Smith's *Old Testament History* has a right to be tested by these before we demand of him what he does not pretend to give.

Yet when these tests are applied, our difficulties begin. Take the second. How do the readers know that they see what the author sees? They follow him along as he brings out this view and that. They see with him very little history in the Old Testament until the time of David. With him they see little to admire in Solomon. With him they look upon the course of a succession of kings few, if any, of whom achieve more than mediocre success, until the curtain falls on the monarchy of Judah. Under his guidance they behold in diminished luster the prophetic figures succeeding one another from Samuel to Zechariah. Of them all the most effectively portrayed is the one least known and admired—Ezekiel. As we pass on, Ezra vanishes into a possible scribal generality, and Nehemiah stands in the foreground of the post-exilic age. A warm glow lights up the career of the Maccabees, and the panorama comes to an end with the sinister figure of Herod. As a whole, everything is in low light. We look upon these Old Testament characters through a veil, woven, in some cases, of uncertainties as to their history, and, in other cases, of mediocrity, incompetence, and imperfection revealed by their careers, until we close the book with a renewed sense of the truth of the aphorism that, while the work is great,

the workers are insignificant. Now, who can say except the author whether we have seen what he sees?

Turning to the other criterion, we are equally at a loss. Who shall decide as to the good judgment of the author when he sums up his discussion of the patriarchal age in the following words?

Our conclusion is that there is no sufficient warrant for supposing individuals Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to have been the ancestors of the people. That Jacob or Israel was the name of a clan (or that they were the names of two separate clans) seems to be made out. Isaac and Abraham are as yet unaccounted for—that is, we know of no tribes or clans that bore these names. Probably both were creations of the legend-building imagination working under the necessities of the patriarchal theory. (P. 50.)

Or this concerning Moses and the Exodus?

The results with which we have to content ourselves in the Mosaic period are meager. There may have been an Israelite clan that sojourned in Egypt. Its exodus was not improbably due to a religious leader. Under this religious leader the people entered into covenant with other desert-dwelling clans at Kadesh. The God who sanctioned the alliance and who became a party to it was Yahweh, the Storm-God of Sinai. He was henceforth the leader of his people in war, and under his encouragement they undertook the conquest of Canaan. (P. 72.)

Or this concerning Solomon?

All that the record pictures is an oriental despot, luxurious and oppressive, but possibly good-natured and genial in personal intercourse. Of statesmanship, in our sense of the word, he had not the faintest glimmer. His religion was of the type held by his contemporaries. Nothing can be attributed to him that really advanced Israel in its world-mission. (P. 171.)

Or this concerning Ezra?

What then is the historical fact which the story of Ezra represents? It is this: During the century after Nehemiah the community in Judah was becoming more rigid in its exclusiveness and in its devotion to the ritual. Ezra is the impersonation of both tendencies. Whether there was a scribe named Ezra is not a matter of great importance. Very likely there was such a scribe to whose name tradition attached itself. First it transferred the favor of Artaxerxes from him to Nehemiah. Then it made him the hero of the introduction of the Law. And finally it attributed to him the abrogation of the mixed marriages. . . . Ezra was the ideal scribe, as Solomon was the ideal king, projected upon the background of an earlier age. (Pp. 396, 397.)

On all these subjects there are other scholars who have judged differently. The real difficulty is that Professor Smith has not been able in the limits of the space allotted adequately to present the grounds of

fact and argument out of which a judgment must arise, and therefore the reader is in the position of receiving his conclusions without being able to decide as to how far they testify to the author's sound judgment. They must stand, therefore, for what they are—the results reached by an expert working in the modern spirit with all the resources of modern Old Testament scholarship at hand. From this point of view the book is of real value. It represents what such a scholar considers the present sum total of tested fact regarding the history of Israel.

Special satisfaction will be found by the reader also in the large use made of the Old Testament literature for the interpretation and vitalizing of the various periods of the history. The literature itself gains new power and significance from the juxtaposition. The greatest success reached by the author here is in the chapter on Ezekiel. Nowhere in English is more light thrown upon this prophet and his relations to his times than by Professor Smith. It will prove a veritable revelation to many readers.

Students of this subject will find many points of disagreement with the author, as is quite natural in a field where much is still unsettled and the decision on particular facts depends so largely on the point of view. These differences of opinion are, however, not vital. What is more significant, in the reviewer's judgment, is the weakness of the book in two respects: (1) its organization, and (2) its interpretation, of Old Testament history. The history is divided into twenty chapters, and the titles of the majority of those chapters have to do with individuals. Thus "The Patriarchs," "The Heroes," "David," "The House of Jehu," "Hezekiah and Manasseh," "Nehemiah and After" are some of the headings. Nowhere is there any hint of periods in the development of Israel's life. Surely it was possible—and in our view it is indispensable in any scientific history today—to divide the field into its main divisions, to organize the material under these main divisions, and thus to give the reader a sense of the relations of things, the pre-eminent and subordinate. As it is, all is on a dead level, and at the end an unskilled reader is inevitably left with a confused and indefinite picture. But this surely is not seeing things as the author sees them.

Yet more central is the lack of the interpretative and vitalizing power. We do not say that this book is dry; it is clear and in some parts strong and stirring. But as a whole many a reader will find the perusal of it a task. The scholarship of the author has, it may be, overmastered him. The destructive work of critical study attracts or impresses him more

than the reconstruction and reorganization of what remains after the critical process is over. Whatever it is, we are disappointed at the absence of all that is beyond a mere pragmatic view of events and periods, or at least at the lack of any vigorous and thoroughgoing attempt to tell us what the modicum of fact concerning the course of Israel's history really means. Something of Ewald's insight here would have transformed what is a clear and scholarly presentation and discussion of facts into a book throbbing with vitality and human interest.¹

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Theism under Natural Law, As Related to Old Testament Criticism and to the Theodicy of *Lux Mundi*. By REV. EDWARD SOFTLEY, B.D. New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1903. Pp. viii + 370. \$1.50.

The author of a book which is submitted for review may rightly demand of the critic a careful reading of that book, and an unbiased estimate based upon an intelligent and a reasonable exegesis. In return, the critic may ask that the book be written in an intelligible style, so that at least the problem of the meaning of its sentences shall not have to be raised.

Judged by this test, the book before us fails. To determine from the author's language what idea he intended to convey is often an impossibility. The English of the book, and its punctuation, are simply inexcusable.² In view of our author's inability to express himself, the reviewer must disavow responsibility for what he makes of Mr. Softley's views; he can only say: The author *appears* to mean so and so.

¹We have noted a few misprints and possible errors in matters of fact: p. 206, "raman" should now be read "adad;" p. 207, note 3, "Jehoash" should be "Amaziah;" p. 234, the date of the death of Ahaz should be 720, not 730; p. 300, Jer. 41:5 may apply to Mizpah and not to the temple at all; p. 328, Neriglissar reigned at least four years and Nabonidus only seventeen. There are also several misprints in the names of books referred to in the notes, but not sufficient to mislead the reader.

²The following are exact quotations: "By way of antithesis, it is characteristic of the righteous that they do, so reflect upon, and talks of God's wondrous works (Ps. 8:9 and 19)" (p. 4). "It may be true, as has been said, that evolution as a theory does not necessarily do away with design in Creation (or rather conflict with the evidence arising from design in Creation), for the existence and operation therein of a Personal First Cause, but only removes it farther back" (p. 5). "Man, as the Creator's handiwork, and ontologically considered, apart from the controlling bias of predominating good, or, morally considered, does so partake of God's image" (p. 22).